

POLICY UPDATE

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ARAB LEAGUE SUMMIT REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

The 26th Arab League Summit, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, came amidst a series of divisive crises in the Middle East and North African region: in Yemen, a Saudi Arabian-led coalition initiated a campaign of airstrikes to counter the advance of the Houthi rebellion; in Libya, a multiparty civil war continues between rival governments and Islamist-oriented groups; in Syria, the civil war enters its fifth year, prolonging the conflict and adding more parties; and in Iraq, the government leads an offensive against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), to regain territory which was seized by the group in the Summer of 2014. Meanwhile, Iran also has an alleged role in the crises in Yemen, Iraq, and Syria, which was referenced during the Summit.

In addition to these issues, the agenda of the Arab League Summit also aimed to monitor the implementation of past recommendations, express support for Palestine and Somalia, and discuss ways to combat extremist groups.

SECURITY CONCERNS

During the two-day Summit, Arab leaders' speeches mainly comprised the two timely themes of security and counter-terrorism. The status quo of the Middle East was cited by Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi as an unprecedented threat to Arab states' sovereignty, security and identity, posing grave present and future consequences to the entire region. The current crises, as explained by Sheikh Emir Sabah el-Sabah, occur within states marked by the unrest of the so-called Arab Spring, where illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, economic failure, and lack of social services run rampant, further compounding the dangers.

Additionally, the exponential rise of extremist groups was highlighted as a result of the dire conditions within the conflict-stricken countries. However, the Arab leaders reiterated that extremist ideology is unjustifiable and neither affiliated with any religious, nor humane values. To confront this growing threat and protect the Arab states, the Summit emphasized the need to create a joint military force, composed of willing states' and supported by jet fighters, warships, and light armor ¹. El-Sisi announced that during the upcoming months, a high-level panel will be formed to lay out the structure and coordinate the mechanism of operation of the future force, which will operate with respect to the United Nations, international law, and national sovereignty.

¹ [See Questions and Answers About the Arab Peacekeeping Force](#)

SUMMIT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Summit recommendations were announced in the Concluding Session by Arab League Secretary General Nabil el-Araby and el-Sisi. They covered a broad range of areas however, specifically targeted regional security affairs.

1. Coordinate joint Arab initiatives, despite any differences, to confront the existential threat to nations' sovereignty, security, and identity.
2. Strengthen bilateral relations between Arab countries.
3. Improve social and economic development, social justice, education, human rights, and women rights, to uplift the quality of life of the Arab citizen.
4. Urge the international community to assist in the fight against regional terrorism.
5. Strengthen and increase Arab intelligence exchange of information, judicial cooperation, and military coordination between countries, to build a comprehensive regional approach to dealing with terrorism.
6. Indiscriminately identify terrorist groups according to their extremist ideology and refuse completely any affiliation they claim with Islam.
7. Modernize and clarify the understanding of Islamic rhetoric through Islamic institutions to emphasize forgiveness, mercy, and tolerance, to prevent radicalization from having an impact on the vulnerable populations, especially youth.
8. Support values of national citizenship and moderation through educational systems, academic institutions, and the media.
9. **Yemen:**
 - a. Continue Operation Storm of Resolve until Yemen is united, legitimacy is restored, and Houthi rebellion surrenders.

The crisis in Yemen that was followed by airstrikes by Arab states, topped the main agenda and discussions in the Summit. The Summit showed its support for the ongoing military action in Yemen while also expressing the ultimate need for dialogue and political resolutions.

Yemen's Foreign Minister, Riad Yassin said the Saudi-led airstrikes in his country prevented the rebels from further attacking cities in Yemen or Saudi Arabia, and that they helped stop Iran's weapon supply line. Qatar's Emir Tamim al-Thani called for the respect of Yemen's legitimate regime while calling upon rebel militias to stand down and all groups to search for a ground for a political solution.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said, "Negotiations—facilitated by my Special Envoy Jamal Benomar and endorsed by the Security Council—remain the only chance to prevent a long, drawn-out conflict. It is my fervent hope that at this Arab League summit, leaders will lay down clear guidelines to peacefully resolve the crisis in Yemen."²

10. Palestine:

- a. Highlight the importance of the Palestinian Question as an important Arab concern.
- b. Press for Palestine's international recognition and Palestinians' rights

President Mahmoud Abbas raised his concerns on Palestine's future seeking support from all Arab states in solving the conflict and backing his country's recognition worldwide. As he supported the joint force and the unity to solve the crisis in Yemen, he asked to show the same unity regarding the Palestinian Question.

² See UNSG Ban Ki-Moon's statement.

At the same time, UN's Chief Ki-moon urged Israel to end the occupation, emphasizing the illegal settlement's impediment to peace. He also called on the Palestinians to overcome their divisions. Russian President Vladimir Putin, on the other hand, pledged support for Palestinian state with capital in East Jerusalem.

Despite Abbas' call for action after outlining the worsening situation in Palestine, the Summit did not consider an immediate solid plan regarding the Palestinian issue, and member states did not go beyond just calling for peace and negotiations.

11. Libya:

- a. Address the transitional phase in Libya, characterized by a weakening of the state by extremist terrorist groups

Libya requested from the Arab nations that the UN arms embargo be lifted in order to prevent the advance of ISIS militants in the country. The war-torn country is divided between the rival governments and Islamist-oriented groups who control the capital Tripoli, along with other towns. While Qatar's Emir al-Thani opposed a military solution in Libya, Aqila Saleh, President of Libya's internationally-recognized parliament, stated that neighboring countries will be the first affected from the spread of ISIS.

Ki-moon put emphasis on Libya's territorial integrity and unity while stressing the importance of encouraging dialogue among the Libyan people. He said that the talks should continue along multiple tracks and facilitated by his Special Representative Bernardino Leon.

12. Iraq:

- a. Assist Iraq in its struggle against extremist groups which threaten its institutions, control of territory, and unity

The main topics that were discussed referring to the situation in Iraq were the rise of extremist groups in the region, such as ISIS, and the existing sectarian conflict which has contributed to a lack of unity. The Summit discussed possible reform and political dialogue to promote reconciliation among the different factions of the country.

13. Syria:

- a. Exert efforts to resolve the crisis in Syria which has resulted in:
 - i. the rise of violence and extremism within the country's region
 - ii. battles between regional and international actors
 - iii. government failure to protect people, territory, and sovereignty

There was no representation from Syria since the Summit suspended the country in 2011. As the war in Syria resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of people, Ban Ki-moon said that he is "ashamed" of the situation and "angry" at the collective failure to end the conflict. On the other hand, al-Thani expressed his opposition to Assad's possible involvement in a political resolution in Syria.

14. Jointly expend all efforts to address these divisive conflicts, whether they are geographical, sectarian, ethnic, religious, or ideological, to protect Arab nations' peoples, territory, unity, independence, and security of borders, within the framework of a modern state.
15. Jointly expend all efforts and adopt preventative and defense-related measures to confront the current challenges created by extremist terrorist groups, through a joint Arab military force.

Hosting Egyptian President el-Sisi concluded by declaring the agreement in principle on establishing a joint Arab military force. A high-level panel will be designated the task of coordinating between the willing countries, within the next four months, to lay out the structure and coordinate the mechanism of operation of the future force, which will operate with respect to the United Nations, international law, and national sovereignty.

The upcoming months will address the scope of action and intervention to be conducted by the joint military force along with details on its leadership, logistics, and resources.

16. Ensure that Arab countries, Israel, and Iran join the non-proliferation initiative of nuclear weapons and that the Middle East is free of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction.

This recommendation addressed the region and specifically Iran, since the talks are being held in Lausanne, Switzerland between Iran and the P5+1 to reach an agreement on Tehran's nuclear program.

17. Increase Arab economic integration; expand free trade zone areas; achieve food and water security; improve economic sustainability and utility of resources; and lessen the existing gaps.

A LETTER FROM RUSSIAN PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN

A letter from President Putin acknowledged the Summit's importance amidst the ongoing economic, security, and political crises and affirmed that Russia stands by Arab states in cooperation and friendship to address the regional security issues peacefully and without external confrontation.

Putin described the crises as serious threats caused by radical groups, which threaten hundreds of thousands of people through acts that are unjustifiable in every sense. He highlighted the need to deal with the pressing issues through a regional initiative; resolve the crises in Yemen and Syria through the use of political dialogue and measures with respect to international law; and establish an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.



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